

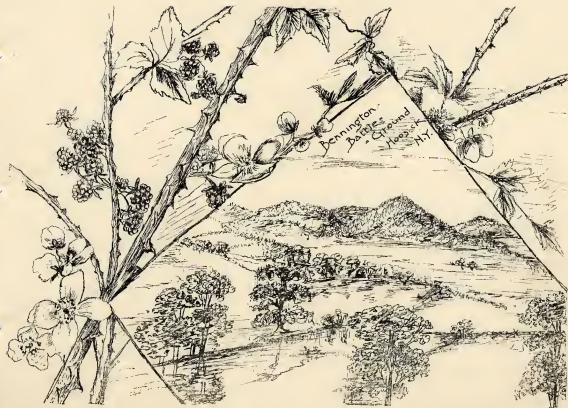


1761.

HISTORIC
BENNINGTON.

HOWE BENNING.

Illustrated by:
C. WESTON.



HISTORIC BENNINGTON.

“**A** MISTAKE made Waterloo to be History,” writes an English historian. The mistake of a path was the beginning of historic Bennington.

Capt. Samuel Robinson, of Hardwick, Mass., who had served in the French war, was, at one time, returning from Lake George to Connecticut by way of Williamstown, and, mistaking the Walloomsac, a branch of the Hoosick, for that river itself, found himself, at nightfall, astray from the Hoosick forts, in a strange country, full of running brooks, with wide valleys and lofty trees, with the long, high range of the Green Mountains sheltering its eastern border, and well-wooded foot-hills swelling to its base. A goodly land, and well worth settling.

And, in the spring of 1761, we find a little band of twenty-two toiling over the mountains and up through the bridle paths of Williamstown and Pownal, all

their worldly possessions on the backs of horses, until they reached the town, that, twelve years before, in 1749, had been surveyed under orders of Benning Wentworth, Governor of New Hampshire, in the name of King George II., and granted a charter of a township, six miles square, to be called Bennington, — the first charter granted to a Vermont town west of the Green Mountains.

But the sixty-four original holders under this grant, had, probably, never placed foot on their possessions, and now readily sold their rights to this company of Massachusetts emigrants. A small band, but of sturdy material, were these families of Robinsons and Harwoods and Pratts, that came first, followed, during that same summer of '61, by the names of Fassett, Wood, Field, Scott, Safford, Smith, Wickwire, Montague, Atwood, Burnham, and Rood. And, a little later, by those of Hubbell, Dewey, Walbridge, Pratt, Warner, Harmon, Fay, and others. The elevated part of the town, known as the "Centre," was first chosen. Huts from logs and brush and bark were speedily built. A little fall grain was sown.

The first long winter of denial and hardship was passed, with the continual

echo of the woodman's axe, making broader clearings for the spring planting. Benjamin Harwood, born in January of 1762, was the first child born in town. In the eighty-nine years of his worthy life, many and varied were the changes he was permitted to see.

In March of '62, it was voted at town meeting to give Samuel Robinson and Joseph Safford five acres of land and forty dollars for building a corn-mill by the first of August. Also, a like sum to any one who would build saw-mills on the east or west sides of town. The grist-mill was built on the site long after occupied by Benton & Co.'s paper mill. A saw-mill, by the same owners, on opposite side of stream, and another by Breakenridge & Henderson, on the stream near the present Roberts' Pulp Mill, at Bennington Falls, four miles distant. All these in the summer of '62.

Men of business were these our ancestors. Seven months and twenty-three days after the first emigrants reached here was held the first "town

meeting," called a "proprietors'" meeting. At this, one act passed, reads: "Voted, That any rattlesnake that is killed in Bennington shall be paid two coppers: the persons bringing in the tail."

But these "proprietors" were men of too good judgment to often pay "coppers" to rattlesnakes.

At this first meeting, also, a committee had been appointed to locate a place to "set the meeting-house;" and, the same month, measures were taken for its erection; though the exact date of the completion of this First Meeting-house in Vermont is not known. The Rev. Jedediah Dewey, the first pastor of its church and congregation, was settled in the fall of 1763. The building stood midway between the site of the present one and the Walloomsac House. It was fifty by forty feet in size, with a porch twenty feet square; and in the upper room of this porch a school was taught for several years. Within the church were galleries on three sides, square pews, and a

Old Brick School
House
1821.



State Alms House . . .
... Built 1780.



First
Meeting
House
in Vermont
1703



Oldest House in town, built 1769.



Mt. Anthony Seminary

sounding-board over the pulpit; while through the east side opened a door toward the burying-ground.

To-day the little meeting-house has long been a thing of the past. The present commodious structure, known as the First Church, stands but a few rods distant. It is a square, plain building, outside; but within, it swells through pillared arches into a lofty dome, whose setting of a Greek cross is skilfully defined in harmonious tints; while the shadowed lights fall through memorial windows, upon soft-hued cushions and woodland carpetings. Beside it is the God's Acre, with its long eastern slope, looking off over the beautiful, teeming valley, to the eternal hills beyond, catching, on its lofty monuments or lowly stone, the first promise of the sunlight, as it breaks over the mountains, or, breathing through its sombre pines, a soft requiem for those who have been borne hither for more than a hundred years, from the hillside and vales all over the town. Here are the long lines of stones bearing the

names familiar to the whole history of the town. And here, close beside the entrance, stands a time-worn slab, bearing this inscription :

IN MEMORY

OF

REV. MR. JEDEDIAH DEWEY,

First Pastor of Church in Bennington,

who, after a laborious life in the Gospel, resigned his office in God's temple for the sublime employment of immortality, Dec. 21, 1778, in the 65th year of his age.

Of comfort no man speak!
Let's talk of grave, and worms, and
Epitaphs, make dust our paper, and with
Rainy eyes write sorrow in the bosom of
the earth."

And, further down the hillside, rises a graceful shaft, sacred to the memory of Rev. Isaac Jennings, who, after a full generation of work among his beloved people, passed to rest, Aug. 25, 1887, aged 72 years. Few have won so many hearts, or left so many mourners, as this great-hearted man of God, whose life motto had been the Charity that is Love.

Back again through the misty past we find our brave-hearted men and women through the years of 1762, '63, and '64, drawing to their numbers many others, establishing schools, settling highways, and beginning a course of prosperity, that, in 1765, received a sudden check. "Men of New England of a superior sort," Bancroft describes them, and, as such, they hated the government of New York, holding it to be too central and aristocratic. When, therefore, Lieut.-Gov. Colden, of New York, pronounced the New Hampshire grants to Bennington unlawful, and claimed the lands for his own favorites, the sturdy pioneers proved true the saying of Ethan Allen, that



Mount Taverne

1769



"the gods of the valleys were not the gods of the hills;" and when the sheriff, with an armed party three hundred strong, marched up from Albany to take possession of the Breakenridge farm, in the north-west part of the town, they found so many settlers gathered there, with determined faces and loaded muskets, that they concluded "discretion to be the better part of valor," and wisely retreated. At this point of Bennington, then, it is said, "Vermont was born;" for, so determined was the resistance to any other, that the western boundary was soon recognized to be a straight line southward from Lake Champlain to the north-west corner of Massachusetts. The headquarters, then and thereafter, of the New York opponents, was at the Catamount Tavern in Centre, kept by Landlord Fay, and having, for its sign, a tall post, surmounted by a stuffed catamount with open mouth, and teeth grinning toward New York. Here, for many years, was the Council Room, where the Council of Safety met in the grave deliberations that finally moored

their Ship of State in safety. Here the bold Col. Ethan Allen issued the call that gathered his Green Mountain Boys for the capture of Ticonderoga. Here, when the threatening cloud of the Revolution hung dark over the land, Gen. Stark and Col. Seth Warner planned for victory, and the turning of success to the American cause. It was one of the most noted houses of New England, the first State House of Vermont. To-day, you see, half way down the broad and beautiful Monument Avenue, a granite block, six feet two inches high, with this inscription: "In enduring honor of that love of liberty and of their homes displayed by the pioneers of this Commonwealth. Forty-five feet east of this spot stood the Catamount Tavern, erected A. D. 1769. Destroyed by fire March 30, 1871. Within its walls convened the Council of Safety, A. D. 1772-'78."

On the former site of this well-known tavern, stands a graceful modern villa. It is difficult, as one stands on this historic spot to-day, and takes into

view the charming valleys filled with every evidence of long prosperity, and girt around by their setting of mountains overlooking scenes of matchless beauty or the graves of our heroic dead; or, as we look up and down the long avenue, with its parks, its bordering of lovely homes, and lift our eyes to its crowning, the beautiful monument, towering, in its gray grandeur, three hundred feet in air, to realize that there was once a day when the long wilderness was broken only by clearings, with the primitive dwellings of settlers. Or what the word meant, when the message swept down from the northern lake through the Green Mountain State, that Burgoyne, with his British regulars, Tories, and Indians, was on the southward march. That was the hour of deepest gloom to our brave young State, Vermont. July 6, 1777, Ticonderoga, held to be the key of the north, had surrendered to our foreign foe. The bloody defeat at Hubbardton had followed; and the enemy, flushed with success, deemed the path clear to a junction with Gen. Howe at New

York. Direst consternation prevailed in Eastern New York and the New Hampshire Grants. A brigade of militia, under Gen. Stark, from New Hampshire, reached Manchester the 7th of August. Finding that the enemy had marched to the Hudson, he passed on to Bennington, reaching there the 9th, and encamping about two miles west of the meeting-house, near the Dimmick place. Here he remained for five days, in council at the Catamount Tavern, with the Council of Safety, Seth Warner, and others.

At the State Arms, standing on the present Monument grounds, was collected a large supply of provisions, ammunition, and stores. This was Burgoyne's particular need; and, to obtain possession, he detached a select company from his main army, placed in command Col. Baum, and sent forward.

The ever-watchful Council, through their spies, Isaac Clark and Eleazer Edgerton, soon guessed his purpose. Word was quickly sent here and there, and the brave Green Mountain Boys prepared to defend their homes. They



Fireplace in the room in Catamount Tavern at
Bennington Center, where the Vermont Council of Safety
held its secret meetings. * * *

poured in from every side, a motley company, from the gray-haired grandsire to the beardless boy; armed with all kinds of weapons, scythes and axes, trusty muskets and Queen Anne firelocks, but all of one purpose, to drive back the approaching foe.

And the wives and mothers, brave as they, buckled on the weapons, bade them "God-speed," and then turned back to homely duties that should cheer and strengthen.

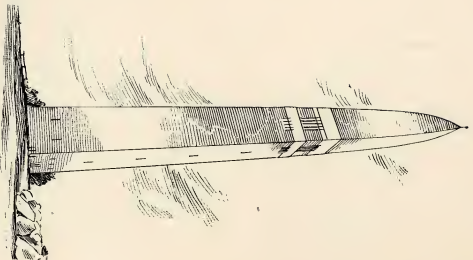
The day before the battle the town was filled with patriots and with their families fleeing from the north. It is told of Mrs. Eldad Dewey, living then on the present Charles Dewey place, that she had such numbers stopping there, that she was obliged to give them lodgings upon the floor. Becoming tired of so many cooks around, she asked her husband, who owned a grist-mill near his house, to supply her with flour, and in one day she made more than three hundred pounds of flour into bread for her soldier guests.

Landlord Fay, of the Catamount, looked, with eyes dim with age, but with patriotic heart, after five sons who joined the soldier band.

David Robinson, afterward Major-General, went out as a private, to give further proof of the undaunted courage, that, the winter before, had led him two hundred miles through deep snows, to the rescue of a company of women and children at Ticonderoga.

Captains Samuel Robinson and Elijah Dewey commanded the two Bennington companies. A copy of Capt. Robinson's Roll has been preserved and is appended to this article for the benefit of the curious.

On the 14th, Stark moved his men some four miles, to an eminence a half mile north of the Walloomsac river, on the Henry farm. Baum had taken up his position about two miles distant, on a commanding height which can be seen from the railroad between the Burgess and Barnet bridges, where he had thrown up embankments of earth and logs, and placed his two brass field pieces.



BENNINGTON BATTLE MONUMENT.

He had been joined by many loyalists, among them Col. Pfister, a British officer, residing near Hoosick Corners, on the present Tibbett's place.

During the rainy 15th, Baum continued fortifying his works of defence.

The 16th of August, 1777, dawned clear and hot. The leaves scarcely stirred in the morning air. At the American camp the laconic address came soon, —

“There are red coats, and they are ours, or this night Molly Stark sleeps a widow.”

Col. Nichols was then detailed to make to the north, and Col. Herrick to make to the south, the two companies meeting in Baum's rear, while others should attack the breast-works in front.

† Silas Walbridge, belonging to Capt. John Warner's company, gives account of this rear attack, and the rout of the Indians; then the retreat of the Hessians down the hill to the south.



WALLOOMSAC HOUSE - PARK AND MONUMENT AVENUE -
BUILT 1774

At mid-afternoon the full attack began, and for two hours the fearful strife raged with the greatest fury. Stark says, "It represented one continual clap of thunder." At last the enemy gave way, leaving their artillery and baggage behind them. But before the victory could be secured, tidings came of a large British re-inforcement under Colonel Breyman, within two miles. The day wavered. Just then Colonel Warner's fresh regiment from Manchester, under Lieut.-Col. Safford, came on the field, and, as Gov. Isaac Tichenor, then assistant commissary and intimate with the officers, states, it was through the influence of Col. Seth Warner, that Gen. Stark, tired and worn, was prevailed upon to make the attack upon the foe, and not wait on the defensive. Col. Warner, who had been with Stark for days, was an officer of great bravery and cool judgment, and as he had been for a long time resident in the west part of the town, he was thoroughly familiar with the field.

It is sufficient that their plan proved wisely chosen, for though the strife

raged with varying success, night found a fleeing foe; our country's flag had been baptized into its first triumph on land, and under the summer stars the swift message of victory went back to the anxious waiting hearts at Bennington.

Several hundred of prisoners were taken to the old meeting-house, and it is related that the women tore up their beds to make cords to tie them together; while there is no doubt that the huge kettles of meat that Mrs. Capt. Dewey had been busily boiling at the Walloomsac House all that day of battle, found plenty of consumers. With his usual promptness, Deacon Harmon had insisted upon burying the fallen foe in two large pits near the scene of battle.

Bennington had fought bravely, and won, but at the price of four of her own loyal sons. These were John Fay, Henry Walbridge, Daniel Warner, and Nathan Clark; and the wail of sorrow for these was the undertone, like a minor chord, in the great symphony that swept over the town.

And tender, stranger hands, carried the gallant Colonel Baum, mortally wounded, to a lowly house a mile and a half distant, near the present lower mill of C. E. Welling. Here he died, and was buried on the bank of the Walloomsac, but the exact spot no one knows.

Roll gently, O sparkling river, and carry a message to the sea, of the proud heart, bounding with hope, that crossed your tide to be laid by alien hands to rest. There are tears and sorrow for foreign homes to-day, but it is freedom here.

For this battle is considered one of the turning-points of the Revolution, the beginning of those successes that culminated in Yorktown and a free land.

All honor, then, to the brave men and women of Bennington, who bore so royally their part, and whose names we find, written in her records, or scattered all through the land, or on the isles of the sea, wherever there is need of help, or justice, or the right.

Copy of Capt. Samuel Robinson's Roll, Aug. 16, 1777.

Robert Cochran,	Edward Henderson,	Ammie Fuller,	Ebenezer Bracket,
Gideon Spencer,	Jonathan Haynes,	Jonah Brewster,	Jehiel Smith,
William Henry,	Archelaus Tupper,	George Dale,	Asa Branch,
Henry Walbridge,	Daniel Warner,	John Marble,	Phinehas Wright,
Rufus Branch,	Lt.Simeon Hathaway,	Ephraim Marble,	John Smith,
John Larned,	Aaron Miller,	Aaron Hubbell,	Jesse Belknap,
Thomas Abel,	John Fay,	Samuel Safford, Jr.,	Silvanus Brown,
Nathan Lawrence,	Elijah Fay,	Aaron Smith,	John Forbes,
Josiah Brush,	Joseph Fay,	Ephraim Smith,	Stephen Williams,
David Fay (<i>Fifer</i>),	John Clark,	David Safford,	William Post,
Leonard Robinson,	Jehosephat Holmes,	Jared Post,	Elisha Smith,
Daniel Biddlecome,	Moses Rice,	Jeremiah Bingham,	Solomon Safford,
Levi Hatheway,	Benj. Whipple, Jr.,	Samuel Slocum,	Joseph Roe,
Abram Hatheway,	Silas Robinson,	Josiah Hurd,	William Terrill,
Reuben Colvin,	John Weeks,	Ezekiel Brewster,	Noah Beach,
Eliphalet Stickney,	Moses Scott,	Solomon Leason,	Simeon Sears,
Daniel Rude,	Alpheus Hathaway,	Thomas Selden,	David Robinson,
Benj. Holmes,	James Marivater,	John Rigney,	Joseph Safford,
Samuel Henry,	Mr. Alger,	Solomon Walbridge,	Isaac Webster,



OUR EDUCATORS.

IN that little collection of eight-inch square leaves, more than a century old, that forms the records of the early town meetings first held at the house of John Fassett, we find early provision made for the support of schools, and as soon as 1765 there were several public schools. The first district school-house stood about four rods west of the later residence of Mrs. S. H. Blackmer.

In 1780, Clio Hall, the first incorporated academy in the State, was built where the First Church now stands. This was destroyed by fire in 1803.

During 1805-6, William S. Cardell resided in North Bennington, and was noted for his facility in imparting instruction. At this time, and until 1828, this village was known as Sage's City, from Capt. Moses Sage, one of the earliest settlers, and a man of great ability and enterprise.

In 1816 Union Academy was built in the lower village, and in '21 the brick Academy at the Centre, which, under the lead of James Ballard was highly

successful. Later, the Mt. Anthony Seminary was built at Centre, and for years two rival and flourishing schools were well sustained by the town. For many later years a school of high instruction was conducted in the Seminary by Prof. George W. Gates.

Later followed a new Academy in the "East Village;" a boarding-school for young ladies, taught by Miss Eliza Clark and her sisters, and another Academy in North Bennington. But the fine graded schools in both these villages have now done away with the need for any other.

One most fruitful source of education — the newspaper — was given to Bennington as early as 1783, when Anthony Haswell published the first number of the Vermont Gazette; this was continued, under different names, but mostly by himself or members of his family, until 1850, more than sixty-seven years. Mr. Haswell was an enterprising man, of extraordinary industry, and active as a politician or a Christian.

The Bennington Banner was established in 1841.

The Reformer at a much later date.

In the early part of the century one well-liked teacher was Hiland Hall, of North Bennington, afterwards so well known in Congress, and still later honored as Governor Hall. He remained an educator by means of his pen through his long life, and has left an "Early History of Vermont," that is exact and voluminous.

And in this connection, also, must be mentioned the "Memorials of a Century," by the Rev. Isaac Jennings. Each book is an honor to the town their writers loved so well.

Truly the workers go on, but their works remain.

Through her pen, and her press, and her teachers, as well as by the able men who have stood in her pulpits, Bennington has helped on the world.

BENNINGTON BATTLE MONUMENT.

MUCH of the heroic will of our ancestors has been needed for this long work. Two of the foremost workers have fallen; Hon. Hiland Hall, full of years and of honors, passed away in 1885; Geo. Robinson, inheriting unbounded patriotism from Gen. David Robinson, is also gone.

But the work is finished, and in August of '91 the structure will be dedicated, and the centennial of Vermont's admission to the Union celebrated.

A monument of blue dolomite, over three hundred feet in height, it stands in lonely grandeur by day, at night a solemn sentinel, overlooking the three lonely villages that have sprung out of the wilderness, the fair Walloomsac valley, and off to the hillside six miles distant, where was fought the battle of which it is itself an enduring memorial.

But the Bennington of the present, come and see for yourself.

Turn your carriage away from Monument Park and drive down the avenue. Note how the two once rival villages of the hill and valley are clasping hands to-day, in the net-work of streets between. See this Bennington of the valley, its long streets embowered in trees, its tall manufactories, its three banks, its electric lights, and water supply system, and postal delivery.

You pass the elegant cathedral of St. Francis de Sales, the long Methodist church, the beautiful Second Congregational block, the graceful Baptist church, the Episcopal, with its drapery of ivy, and the French Catholic.

There are two old gentlemen discussing busily some point. Members of the Historical Society, probably, arguing over the meaning of Walloomsac.

Here are the Y. M. C. A. Rooms, and there the brick building of the Free Library, gift of S. B. Hunt and T. W. Park.

Drive out past one of the most perfectly equipped school buildings in the

State, to the Soldier's Home, standing amid its wood and lawn of two hundred acres in extent, with what is believed to be the highest fountain in the world, gift of the heirs of Mr. Park to the State.

A little further is the residence of the late Rev. Frederic G. Clark, D.D., son of Daniel A. Clark, a former pastor of the First Church. This Rev. D. A. Clark, as well as a still earlier pastor, Dr. Job Swift, left many descendants, and a marked impress upon the town.

Then on over the five miles level drive to North Bennington, passing the Methodist church at Hinsdillville, once a flourishing manufacturing village under the lead of Deacon Hinsdill; then the large stereoscope works of H. C. White. Note, high on the hill, "Fairview," on the grounds from which Hiram Bingham went out as a pioneer missionary to Sandwich Islands.

Here is the fine railroad depot and grounds, largely the gift of Gen. McCullough; a fine school building, and three churches, the Baptist, Congrega-

tional, and Catholic; a prosperous bank, a busy paper-mill, more stereoscope mills, a novelty mill.

Now further on to the west, past Baum's burial place, over the rough Battle Hill; then turn back and ride up the long stream again.

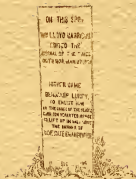
There are beautiful homes everywhere.

The sun is sinking behind the western hills. Higher and higher its last rays are creeping up the mountain sides before you; they have kissed the top; they are gone; and the spirit of the past, that has travelled with you, slips away also into its shadows.

Good-night.

HOWE BENNING.





TABLET, BRUNSWICK COUNTY